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CORRESPONDENCE

A POEM IN THE COLLINS CANON

The *Song: The sentiments borrowed from Shakespeare*, printed with Collins's works since Johnson's *English Poets* (1790), has always been felt to be of doubtful authenticity. Professor Bronson discovered that it appeared anonymously in the *Public Advertiser*, March 7, 1788;¹ it has not been shown that the verses had appeared earlier. Thirty years later we find the same piece positively attributed to another man. William Beloe, in *The Sexagenarian; or, the Recollections of a Literary Life*,² prints the song as the work of Henry Headley (1765-1788), best known as the editor of *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry*. Beloe is not always trustworthy, but he writes as a friend of Headley's; and on the evidence at hand Headley's authorship seems at least as probable as Collins's. At least one other poem in the *Public Advertiser*, where our song appeared, was ascribed to Headley.³ He wrote an *Ode to the Memory of Chatterton* in the metre of the *Ode to Evening*, with diction reminiscent of Collins. Similarly the song in question might be an imitation of Collins's *Song from Shakespeare's Cymbeline*. Chronologically it is easier to associate the poem with Headley, who died in the year of its appearance in the *Advertiser*, than with Collins, who had died almost thirty years before. Whether or not we give the song to Headley, we have less reason than ever to give it to Collins.

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A BRIEF REJOINDER

The notice of my *Study of Metre* which appeared in your January issue over well-known initials has interested me so much that I ask leave to add a few further words on the subject. Prosody is indeed "a fair field full of fighting folk" (Saintsbury), but critics have nothing to complain of when weapons are wielded with the skill and urbanity shown by your contributor (or should I say, editor?).

He makes one important pronouncement when he says that

¹ *The Poems of William Collins* (Athenaeum Press Series), p. 80.

² Second edition, London, 1817, I, pp. 173-179.

³ Thomas Park, *Works of the British Poets*, London, 1808, xli, p. 41.